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THE REAGANS AND THEIR PASTOR

BY WILLIAM ROSE

Religion Writer Oakland (Calif.) Tribune

"Governor Reagan and I have spent many hours together on our knees," says his pastor, the Rev. Donn Moomaw, of the Bel Air Presbyterian Church of L. A. and one of the founders of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes.

"Governor Reagan is a man without guile—one of the most principled men I know."

This is the way the Rev. Donn Moomaw, pastor of the Bel Air Presbyterian Church, Los Angeles, (see "Church on the Mountaintop," CHRISTIAN LIFE, July 1963) characterizes his noted parishioner.

"In his decisions he tries to be morally right, use his common sense and seek the guidance of God," says the former UCLA All-American linebacker and one of the founders of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes who passed up a pro football career for the ministry.

Politicians and writers critical of the Governor have voiced different views—ranging from skepticism of his denial he is not a candidate for president to charging he, too, has a credibility gap.

Others, like Moomaw, contend that a person never really knows another until he has prayed with him.

The Governor and his wife, Nancy, practitioners of daily prayer, have often invited their pastor to their Pacific Palisades home in the western extremity of Los Angeles to talk and to pray.

"We've spent many hours together on our knees," says Moomaw.

Among the perplexing problems the Reagans and their pastor have discussed and prayed about was the decision to seek the office of governor, and later the clemency plea of Aaron Mitchell, the only person to die in San Quentin's gas chamber in recent years.

"You can have convictions but you can really 'bleed' over problems such as these. We still need to seek God's guidance for a possible new insight to the conviction we might hold," Moomaw told me.

He said that immediately after the Governor's election in November 1966, Reagan and his wife came to the church for prayer.

"All through my life I've received comfort and



Governor Reagon and his wife, Nancy, began attending the Bel Air Presbyterian Church in 1964.
 "I neither tailor my message for the Governor, nor reword it to tell him how I feel about the latest bills," says the Rev. Donn Moomaw (center).

help from God when I've asked for it. I guess the two things I ask for most in my prayers are wisdom and strength," says the Governor.

When he stood in the rotunda of the capitol in Sacramento for the oath of office during the first minutes of 1967, he surprised the assembled guests and the television audience by declaring his intention to conduct his office according to the teachings of Jesus Christ and to seek God's help in the discharge of his duties.

"I can't conceive of anyone trying to meet the problems we face today without help from God," said the Governor, the first Hollywood actor to make it so big in politics that he is considered one of the top possibilities for the Republican presidential nomination.

Today, after 16 months in office, the Governor says, "While prayer always has been a part of my life, I have spent more time in prayer these past months than in any previous period I can recall.

"The everyday demands of this job could leave me with many doubts and fears if it were not for the wisdom and strength that come from these times of prayer."

Moomaw says, "The Governor not only uses prayer to seek God's guidance and His will but also to condition his heart and mind so he will be able to respond in the right way to whatever comes."

During a visit to Sacramento a few weeks ago, in company with Robert Walker, editor of *CHRISTIAN LIFE Magazine*, I asked the Governor if it was true he had committed his life into Christ's hands to be used as He saw fit, as rumors had indicated he had done before he decided to be a candidate for governor.

"Yes! yes!" came the reply. "I've always believed there is a certain divine scheme of things. I'm not quite able to explain how my election happened or why I'm here, apart from believing it is part of God's plan for

me."

Then, with his pleasant smile turning into a grin, he said, "There are some days I ask 'Why am I here?' more than others."

Some of those who have attended conferences in Sacramento in which the Governor is faced with a decision report that Reagan's reference to "God's will" or plan is very much a part of him.

According to these sources, he frequently blurts out, after listening to the pro's and con's of a proposal, "If it's God's will, let's do it."

Governor Reagan's emphasis on God's guidance in his life is the product of his mother's effort to instill basic beliefs and convictions in her son when he was young.

While much of what the Governor said during his first hours in office came from his early training and, to some degree from contacts with his pastor, Reagan's quiet promise at his inaugural to conduct his office according to the teachings of Christ was inspired by a statement attributed to Benjamin Franklin.

He quoted Franklin as suggesting that the man who dared to bring the teachings of Jesus Christ to public office would revolutionize the world around him.

At a prayer breakfast during inaugural week, Reagan amplified the reason he quoted Franklin and made the unexpected pledge:

"Faith in God is absolutely essential if a person is to do his best. Sometimes we're afraid to let people know that we rely on God. Taking this stand just seems to be a logical and proper way to begin."

The Governor then added he did not want anyone to think he was so presumptuous as to imply that his efforts to adhere to the teachings of Jesus would be without flaw.

Among those Reagan invited to his inaugural prayer breakfast was his pastor, who was asked to speak. Talking of the Governor's church participation, he said he was certain Reagan had listened to his sermons because he had heard many of his illustrations come bouncing back at him in some of the Governor's campaign speeches.

Last November Moomaw and his wife accompanied the Reagans to watch the pastor's alma mater battle the University of Southern California for the right to play in the Rose Bowl. The Rev. Mr. Moomaw, now 38, but still near his playing weight of 220 pounds of 15 years ago, seldom misses one of these fracas.

Said the Governor with a twinkle in his eye, "Donn was making it tough for USC, praying like he was for UCLA. But after USC won, I forgave him."

Returning to the matter of his pastor's use of illustrations, the Governor said, "Donn doesn't hesitate to use stories to illustrate a point. I believe an illustration, like a picture, is worth a thousand words. Jesus used parables

to make His points and help people understand."

He said he and his family—which includes a daughter, Patti, age 15, and Skipper (Ronald Jr.), age 9—had attended a church in Beverly Hills but changed to Moomaw's church in 1964 "because the geography in Los Angeles is such that we found ourselves living an hour's drive away from the church."

"We looked for a church nearer our area and it turned out to be the Bel Air Presbyterian. It was love at first sight—or sound. I tell you that we never listen to Donn that we don't feel richer for it."

"I can't recall when I've looked forward more to going to church. I guess my expectation comes from knowing I'll come away inspired."

The Governor added that his wife and children share his feeling. He said the children actually ask to go to church now, instead of hoping to avoid going as they once did.

Moomaw says that during worship services when the Reagans are present, "I can look down at the Governor and Nancy and find the kind of response that gives me encouragement. It is especially helpful when the point I'm trying to make doesn't seem to be going over too well."

However, said the pastor, the Governor and his family are not given any special treatment when they come to church.

He said there had been one occasion soon after Reagan was elected when this policy was inadvertently broken. Two young ushers, seeing the Governor arriving, moved some people out of the pew the Reagans usually occupied.

Moomaw said the action so disturbed him he left the pulpit in charge of his assistant to go to those who had been moved and apologize. He then cautioned the ushers to treat everyone equally, noting that all people expect equal treatment before God.

The Reagan's pastor said he endeavors to follow the same principle in his preaching. "I neither tailor my message just for him nor do I reword it to take advantage of the Governor's presence to tell him how I feel about the latest bills that are before him."

Governor Reagan says he is happy that his pastor follows this practice because he goes to church for spiritual insights to help meet his problems.

"I believe the Bible is more than a manual for public assistance programs. I don't believe the church is to be a staging area for demonstrations even though there is a need for the church to deal with the present day problems being faced by society."

Moomaw describes his responsibility to the Governor as the same as it is to any other person in the audience.

"I'm there to be a pastor to all the people—those who come to church are

seekers together. I know that almost everyone comes with a burden or great responsibility and I want to prepare them in the Gospel so that in facing their problems they can make responsible decisions. That's true whether he's an unheralded voter or whether he's the governor of the state," says Moomaw.

Hearing of his pastor's views on special treatment for the Governor, Reagan said, "I would be most uncomfortable if anything special or unusual was done for me just because I've changed jobs."

"However, there are times when I'm in church I think God might recognize the magnitude of my responsibility and give me an extra portion of His grace—and I don't feel guilty for feeling that way."

"I feel that the Lord has such a good supply of grace He doesn't have to ration it. I know He is able to care for all my needs and everyone else's, too."

The Governor said that as he has grown older—he is now 57—and has assumed greater and greater responsibilities he is more appreciative than ever of the time and effort his mother spent to instill faith and need for daily family prayer in him.

"Just seeing my mother's faith under trying circumstances over long periods of time has enabled me to realize that when Jesus said, 'wherever two or three are gathered in My name, there am I also' He meant He is with us in every situation and circumstance."

He said it was his mother who first helped him realize that God has a prescribed way to face difficult situations.

"She had an abiding faith in the necessity to believe and trust that everything that happens, happens for some good reason, and while you can't always see the reason at the moment, it happens for the best."

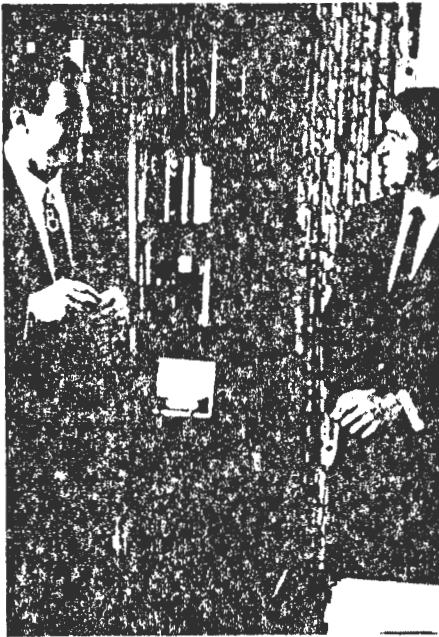
"She believed that if a person does have this kind of faith in God and faces up to the situation without rebellion or bitterness and is willing to wait for a time, he will learn the reason and discover its place in the Divine scheme of things."

Then, recalling his indication that God must have a reason for enabling him to reach the governor's office, Reagan said, "There's nothing automatic about God's will."

"I think it is very plain that we are given a certain control of our destiny because we have a chance to choose. We are given a set of rules or guidelines in the Bible by which to live and it is up to us to decide whether we will abide by them or not."

The Governor said he likes the way his pastor refers to Jesus Christ as being the quarterback of a person's life.

"While the quarterback calls the plays, it is necessary for everyone involved to perform his assignment. Jesus tells us what is required and He promises what the result will be if we comply. If we want to score in the game of life, we have to execute the plays the quarterback calls."



Governor Reagan and Moomaw share a mutual appreciation for each other.

Here the Governor paused for a moment and said he wanted to make it clear that "whatever has happened to me, whatever I've accomplished or attained, I could not have done without God's help.

"I believe that if I ever forget that part of my faith, if I ever forget what He has done or if I begin thinking I'm able to do something without His help, the blessings of faith will disappear as fast as an early snow.

"I simply believe that if you put your faith in God and ask for strength and wisdom to do what has to be done and at the same time do your best to do what you believe is right, you will be given the strength and wisdom to do it."

This bit of philosophy expressed by the Governor was voiced in a similar way by his wife, Nancy, during a conversation with this writer in Oakland where she was guest of honor at a Campus Crusade for Christ Women's Luncheon.

Asked if she subscribed to the definition of a Christian as being a person in whom Christ dwells to give guidance, strength and power to all that he does, Mrs. Reagan replied, "Yes, very definitely."

Regardless of such replies or all the Governor has said about his Christian training and convictions, Moomaw is besieged continually by those who want to know if the Governor is "spiritually reborn" or "a born-again Christian."

To every such inquiry Moomaw has replied, "Yes, he is a Christian because the only kind of Christian I know is a born-again Christian."

While the Governor is careful not to offend adherents of other faiths in his public utterances, he seldom misses an opportunity to indicate something of his own belief.

Just before this last Christmas, when some carolers came to the rotunda of the capitol, Governor Reagan greeted

them and those who came to listen. He said, "My greetings are for those of all faiths, including those who believe Jesus was merely a great teacher, and for those, who like me, believe He is the Promised Messiah, the Son of God."

Moomaw said he has been pleasantly surprised to learn how knowledgeable the Governor is on what the Bible says about the Second Coming of Christ.

He said he and evangelist Billy Graham visited Reagan one day when the Governor was in the hospital for a brief period. He said Graham and Reagan became engrossed in a discussion of Bible prophecy in relation to the signs of the times and that Reagan held his own with the noted evangelist.

When I asked the Governor about this he eagerly related the experience.

"We got into a conversation about how many of the prophecies concerning the Second Coming seemed to be having their fulfillment at this particular time. Graham told me how world leaders who are students of the Bible and others who have studied it have come to this same conclusion—that apparently never in history have so many of the prophecies come true in such a relatively short time.

"After the conversation I asked Donn to send me some more material on prophecy so I could check them out in the Bible for myself. You know I was raised on the Bible. I also taught it for a long time in Sunday School."

The discussion of his Sunday School experiences and his frequent references to his indebtedness to his mother for his early Christian training, triggered Reagan's thinking on a subject that concerns him and his wife—parental responsibility for the religious training and setting an example for their children.

The Governor says he believes young people should have a well-rounded religious education. "There are too many people who seem to think that religion is something that can wait until it happens to come along. Somehow they have the idea that their children will absorb religious teachings without the need to impress them upon them."

Mrs. Reagan, age 45, says she has observed that most parents are embarrassed about religion and leave the spiritual training of their children as a sort of an afterthought.

"They think they're square if they talk about God and make religion a part of their daily lives and conversation. Talking about God should be a normal thing—not the sign of a square.

"Because of parental neglect in this area I think the young people of today are honestly and sincerely trying to find a cause in which to believe.

"No wonder they're confused. They look at their parents and see they're not living up to the rules of conduct they taught them in earlier years and they're not sure what is right.

"Parents must set an example by paying more than lip service to the

things they try to teach their children. I'm afraid many parents haven't done this, and now it is the children who are suffering. Children are rebelling because they're unhappy and disillusioned," Mrs. Reagan says.

The Governor said the problem of adults having one standard of conduct for themselves and setting another for their young people has really come home to him during visits to college campuses.

"If there's one thing young people can smell faster than anything else in an adult it is hypocrisy. . . . Not long ago I spoke to about 10,000 students at Kansas State University. I told them I didn't think their rebellion and unrest is due to the things we adults have been trying to teach them as much as it is that not enough of us have been living by the principles we try to teach them.

"There was a moment of silence and then those 10,000 college kids came to their feet roaring like I've never heard. They were literally saying, 'That's what we are rebelling against!'"

The Governor said that in the terms of "my previous profession, all the world's a stage and we're on the stage all the time. If we could just remember that someone is an audience for everything we do I'm sure we all would live differently.

"We may not understand the way we are being used or how we may be influencing someone else, but we are. We never know what person, in need of a good example, happens to be watching us when we do some foolish thing that disappoints both him and God."

It is this forthright approach that makes Reagan a much-wanted speaker.

Reporters who cover the Governor's press conferences and veteran political observers believe Reagan's sincerity and ability to project it is one of his greatest assets.

One veteran political reporter said, "The average guy looks at him and says he's trying to do right. He is trying to do what the average guy thinks he would do if he were governor."

Who gets the credit for this picture? If Reagan were asked, it is this reporter's opinion his answer would be simply, "God."

William Rose, 48, religion writer for the *Oakland (Calif.) Tribune*, is at

home in the pulpit as well as in a newspaper office. An ordained minister in the American Baptist Convention, he often preaches at the First Baptist Church, Brisbane, Calif. He also is active in the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. His hobby is filming football games for high school and college coaches. Rose and his wife Lucille have one son, Raymond, a sophomore at USC.



EXCERPTS FROM GEORGE OTIS' INTERVIEW WITH RONALD REAGAN

GEORGE OTIS: You know I have a copy of a statement that you made earlier this year regarding a need for spiritual renewal in America and I wonder if I could impose upon you to share it. Would you mind reading it to us so that we might know just what you feel?

RONALD REAGAN: Yes, I remember when this was asked of me and it wasn't easy to boil it down to a few paragraphs or one page but the best that I could do was to say..."In this Bicentennial year we are daily reminded that our strength and our greatness grew from a national commitment to God and Country. Those institutions of freedom which became famous world-wide were forged in the fires of spiritual belief; yet today many of these institutions are in jeopardy.

"The time has come to turn back to God and reassert our trust in Him for the healing of America. This means that all of us who acknowledge a belief in our Judeo-Christian heritage must reaffirm that belief and join forces to reclaim those great principles embodied in that Judeo-Christian tradition and in ancient Scripture. Without such a joining of forces, the materialist quantity of life in our country may increase for a time, but the quality of life will continue to decrease.

"As a Christian I commit myself to do my share in this joint venture.

"Our Country is in need of and ready for a spiritual renewal. Such a renewal is based on spiritual reconciliation - man with God, and then man with man.

"A Bicentennial celebration is only important if we can learn from its history. One lesson should be that as a nation it's 'In God We Trust.'"

GEORGE OTIS: What are your views on legislating prayer out of the school? It is really legislating God out of the schools in a way. How do you feel about that?

RONALD REAGAN: I don't think He ever should have been expelled! First of all, there is a double threat there. There is not only

the removal of the calling upon God but those who didn't feel they should, all right, it was their right to remain silent. But the second threat is that by taking prayer out it appears in the eyes of young people that there has been an official ruling out of God-that, therefore, He wasn't of sufficient importance to be in the schools.

GEORGE OTIS: Now I want to ask you a very personal question. You have said and written in your spiritual statement that you are a Christian. I would like to know what that means to you. In the New Testament it tells about a Jewish leader who came one night to Jesus and asked Jesus about His relationship with God. Jesus answered back to him, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Chuck Colson, the Nixon lawyer who went to prison, used that very phrase "born again" as the title of his book. This is the story of his conversion and the changes in his own life and I would like to know what this phrase "born again" means to you? And, if it is not too personal, have you been born again?

RONALD REAGAN: Well I think I know what the expression means. I certainly know what the meaning of it is today among those who believe in that. I can't remember a time in my life when I didn't call upon God and hopefully thank Him as often as I called upon Him. And yes, in my own experience there came a time when there developed a new relationship with God and it grew out of need. So, yes, I have had an experience that could be described as "born again."

GEORGE OTIS: That is very interesting. It was a very straight statement that Jesus made to Nicodemus. And you are saying, "Yes, I have really answered back to Jesus and said I want you to be the leader of my life. I want God to be my leader." Is that what you are saying?

RONALD REAGAN: That is what I am saying.

GEORGE OTIS: Many have been concerned about the increase of drug and alcohol related problems in America. It is really a growing concern. Even so, several state legislatures are now lifting legal restraints and thereby moral restraints, I feel, on marijuana. Some are now saying this drug should be legitimized at the federal level. Do you advocate the legalizing of marijuana?

RONALD REAGAN: No. I was opposed to it all the time when I was governor. I still am opposed to it. First of all I think that it is a far more dangerous drug than most people are prepared to admit. I speak from some knowledge because I had to learn a great deal about it when I was governor and it

is probably one of the greatest threats confronting young Americans. The second thing is this. If the government takes the marijuana legalizing position, once again you have almost put an official seal of approval on this drug. This means we have said to a generation of young people, "Well, we don't take it very seriously. We don't think it is so harmful after all." No, I wish in part of this revival that is going on that a generation of young Americans would decide they would be the generation that doesn't need a crutch.

GEORGE OTIS: Governor Reagan, Concerning another country that is extremely unique and seems to be a country that has been constantly in the news in the last 25 years, and maybe it is for the following reason. Perhaps the most dramatic Bible prophecy which has been fulfilled right in our own day is the reemergence of Israel as a nation. The Bible calls the Jews "chosen people" and it promises a blessing to those nations who bless the Jews. In view of this spiritual principle, what do you feel America should do if ever Israel was about to be destroyed by attacking enemy nations?

RONALD REAGAN: Here again we have a relationship. We have a pledge to Israel for the preservation of that nation. They are an ally and have been a long time friend. Again, we keep our commitment. I think there is a tendency today to go along with the things you were mentioning in our talk about "the easy way." There are many people taking advantage of the war weariness that came from the long conflict in Viet Nam. There are many people who say that no agreement is worth keeping if it causes trouble to ourselves. We can't live that way. We have an obligation, a responsibility and a destiny. We are the leader of the free world and I think that to a certain extent in the last few years we have abdicated that leadership in a very definite withdrawal of moral commitments.

GEORGE OTIS: It is almost as though people say, "Korea is so far away, and Israel is so far away, it really isn't any of our business. Why should we entangle ourselves? It is kind of like Pilate of old who washed his hands and hoped it would go away. But it seems like these things are creeping closer and closer towards our doorstep...

RONALD REAGAN: I have always wanted to ask someone if they were on this side of the street and over on the other side of the street they saw someone abusing and beating up some defenseless person who couldn't take care of themselves. They wouldn't think anything at all of crossing the street to help that person. Well, what difference does distance make? If it is just across the street, or across the ocean, or across a border, isn't the moral obligation the same? Did the good

Samaritan measure the distance of the road before he crossed over?

GEORGE OTIS: About the Bible, more and more people believe what the Bible really says about itself, that it has been given to mankind under the inspiration of God Himself, yet others say it is merely a great collection of writings about ancient history, folklore and poetry. We would like to know what you believe and what the Bible really means to you.

RONALD REAGAN: I have never had any doubt about it being of divine origin. And to those who do doubt it I would like to have them point out to me any similar collection of writings that have lasted for as many thousands of years and is still the best seller worldwide. It had to be of divine origin. How can you write off the prophecies in the Old Testament that hundreds of years before the birth of Christ predicted every single facet of His life, His death, and that He was the Messiah. They could say, "Well, they were fortune tellers and it was just luck."

GEORGE OTIS: As you become the leader of perhaps the most prosperous nation in all history, how would you go about selecting leaders? Would you consider only the counsel of men or would you have that be a blend of the counsel of men and also seeking God's guidance on decisions?

RONALD REAGAN: The latter, of course, I would have to do. When we did this in California and I became governor I often have told about one of the requirements. I didn't seek people who wanted government Careers. I didn't want people who had a personal ambition for government. I wanted people who had actually considered it a service. They would be giving up a period of their lives to serve their fellow man and the community. And in addition, I don't want pragmatists. I don't want people who practice situational ethics. I would want people who abide by principle. I made a promise to myself in the campaign and it still holds true. I kept that promise, and it was that every decision which I would have to make would be based on what was morally right or wrong. Not what was politically advantageous to anyone.

GEORGE OTIS: One of the things that I know you are aware of and I'm excited about is the fact that this great spiritual revolution that has been occurring in our nation for the last 5 or 10 years has begun to move upon the hearts of the people who have been silent so long. This silence has allowed the political processes in Washington to be neglected because of the mistaken idea that politics and religion don't mix. I am happy that there is a tremendous new wave that is causing these good and very able people to stand up and be interested and stand up for issues and the kind of people they are sending there. Do you believe Christians should make themselves available for public office?

RONALD REAGAN: Certainly. Oh yes. I have always said that one of the things that the founding fathers could never anticipate was the professional politician. I don't mean that they are all bad. We have had great statesmen who have made careers out of government service, but I think that one of the reasons that a congressional term is two years is so that they were not politicians--they were citizens who gave of themselves to form this government. I think they envisioned a nation in which the same thing would continue to happen. So, therefore, they made congressional terms two years so that those who had served a stint or two in Congress would then go home and say, "All right, it is your turn. You work there." We have come to the place where there isn't enough outside influence in government. Now we've aggravated that with the professional bureaucrat who isn't even subject to change at the polls throughout his entire life. I think we've suffered that which Cicero called "the arrogance of officialdom."

So, yes, have statesmen and have people who make a career but always have that infusion from the ranks of the citizenry who say, "I will go for a time and perform a service."

GEORGE OTIS: Teddy Roosevelt called the presidency the greatest pulpit in the nation. He felt that men who had a capability to exercise leadership in long range, and not just short range matters, was essential for the quality for the presidency. Would you use the presidency as a pulpit for leadership?

RONALD REAGAN: Oh I think that is long overdue. I think this is one of the things that is wrong. This hasn't happened since Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Whether people agreed with what he urged or not he really took his case to the people over the head of government. Harry Truman once described the president as the only representative of all the people in Washington. He is the lobbyist for the people. He's the one man that represents the nation as a whole. The rest are either representing states or congressional districts. He represents the people and my definition of leadership has been not necessarily one who does great things himself but one who can persuade others to do great things.

GEORGE OTIS: The last question I would like to know is, if you have the privilege to be at the helm of the United States of America, do you envision yourself as being a president who not only sits at his desk but would be a president on his knees a fair amount of time?

RONALD REAGAN: It is inconceivable to me that anyone could have done the job I had to do as governor and certainly the job in Washington would be impossible unless that man felt he could call on God for help knowing that help was forthcoming.